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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES CITIZEN CONCERNS IN ARMENIA'S
SYUNIK REGION

1. (U) Summary: Ambassador Ordway discussed USG assistance programs and current events with Armenians living in the southern province of Syunik during a town hall meeting June 8 in the provincial capital of Kapan. The meeting was part of a broader schedule of USG assistance site visits and political consultations with representatives from regional and local government bodies. Armenians raised the issues of education, youth programs, refugees and infrastructure needs and asked the Ambassador to continue looking for ways to match USG assistance programming to urgent needs at the local level. National and regional press covered the event which was organized through a network of local NGOs active in democracy and governance. End summary.

TOWN HALL MEETING BRINGS TOGETHER NGOS, AMCITS, GOAM REPS

2. (U) Ambassador Ordway met with Armenians living in the southern province of Syunik to discuss USG assistance and current events during a town hall meeting June 8 in the provincial capital of Kapan. Volunteers from local NGOs active in democracy and governance issues constituted the majority of the participants. Local government leaders, Amcits living in the region and citizens interested in U.S.-Armenia issues also attended the event.

PEOPLE SPEAK OUT ON EDUCATION, YOUTH, RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

3. (U) Following the screening of a video presentation summarizing USG assistance efforts in Armenia, Armenians posed questions on a wide range of assistance-related issues. Educators from local schools raised the issue of how the USG chose schools for programs including the Armenian School Connectivity Program and USAID's Public Works Project (a countrywide structural rehabilitation program involving schools and other municipal buildings). Educators and municipal leaders said there was a continued need for youth programs in the province and expressed their perception that there were increasingly limited government resources in this area. Participants also raised questions about USG and donor community approaches to the most urgent needs of refugee communities, including housing and employment.

MATCHING ASSISTANCE TO "EVERYDAY NEEDS"

4. (U) A common theme among participants' questions and comments was a perceived need by Armenians in the Syunik region to better channel their input to the government and donor organizations like the USG regarding future assistance programs. Attendees from both government and NGO organizations suggested that their opinions regarding urgent assistance needs at the local level were not a central part of the policy-making process. Ambassador Ordway responded to these concerns by outlining USG assistance strategies and the newly-adopted USAID five-year strategy. He also mentioned the upcoming consultative process related to the GOAM's Millennium Challenge Account compact submission and encouraged civic organizations to stay abreast of MCA developments and voice their input.

ASSISTANCE SITES IN ARMENIA'S SOUTH

5. (U) The town hall meeting was part of a broader schedule of USG assistance site visits and consultations with local leaders in the Syunik region. The Ambassador and representatives from USAID and Peace Corps visited USG assistance project sites including a meeting with GOAM officials at the Armenia-Iran border control point in Meghri, a Community Self Help Fund renovation project in the region's largest elementary school, a newly privatized mining facility involving significant investment from U.S. investors, Peace Corps volunteers in the town of Goris. The Ambassador also presided at the inauguration of a newly-

renovated psychiatric hospital in Kapan. The hospital project involved USG funding and cooperation from four other humanitarian assistance providers. Regional government and Ministry of Health representatives praised the project as a prime example of collaboration among the donor community. The Ambassador also consulted with the Marzpet (Governor) and mayors as part of the trip schedule.

DESPITE UPCOMING ELECTION, LITTLE POLITICAL BUZZ

16. (U) Despite a regional by-election scheduled for June 13 and a flurry of activity among opposition politicians in April and May, there was relatively little discussion among town hall participants or government interlocutors about political issues during the Ambassador's visit. (Note: The election for the majoritarian seat in Armenia's National Assembly was called after MP Suren Khachatryan was appointed Syunik's new marzpet in March 2004. Only one candidate, Vahan Hakobyan remained in the race. Hakobyan is the son of Kocharian supporter Maxim Hakobyan -- a wealthy and influential business figure with considerable ties to Syunik's mining industry. End note.) When asked about the election, most Armenians expressed confidence that Hakobyan would garner the necessary fifty percent of the vote and take the election. NGOs active in democracy and governance programs expressed similar views following the town hall meeting and even went so far as to predict an "uneventful" election on June 13 (septel).
ORDWAY